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THE EXCAVATION OF ANCIENT GEZER

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In a previous number of the *Biblical World* (Vol. XXI, pp. 407 ff.) an account was given of the excavations of the "Palestine Exploration Fund" at Tell el Jezer or Jezery at their earlier stage. The work has now been for a time closed on account of the expiration of the three years' permit—the Turkish *firman*—and so, although it is quite hoped that a new *firman* may be obtained in a few months to complete the excavation of this site, this is a convenient occasion for briefly reviewing the general results. What is written here is by way of supplement to what was written in the previous article. It will be convenient to summarize the results under three headings. The light thrown by the excavations on (1) the state of culture, (2) the religious condition, and (3) the biblical accounts of the pre-Israelite and Israelitish inhabitants of Gezer.

1. *The state of civilization in Gezer in ancient times.*—In the previous paper some reference has been made to the great walls built round the *tell*. Since these preliminary results were published these remains have been much more fully examined and some previous conclusions as regards their date require revision. The earliest "wall" is a rampart of earth, faced inside and outside with stones, a very primitive concern, indeed. This is founded upon the surface of the rock and inclosed the whole of the top of the *tell*. It is calculated that this first "wall" goes back at least as far as 3000 B. C., possibly considerably earlier. Inside this, and inclosing the whole hill, is a well-built wall about fourteen feet thick, which is much ruined in places. At intervals of about ninety feet on its course are narrow towers of short projection. At a point on the south side was unearthed a very remarkable, massive brick gateway. The towers on each side of the gate were found still standing to the height of sixteen feet, but had evidently been much higher. The passage between the towers was nine feet wide and forty-two feet long and

was roughly paved with stones. Both the gate and the wall to which it belonged had been ruined at an early date for the former was overlaid by a city which, by the objects—scarabs, etc.—buried in it, belonged to the time of Amenhotep III. In other words, this wall and gate were ruined at least as early as 1500 B. C. The third wall, which must have been built very soon after the ruin of the second, inclosed a larger area than either of its predecessors; and as no other trace of wall was found it is clear this must have been the city's defense from about 1500 B. C. to 100 B. C., when Gezer disappears from history as a fortified post. (The later occupations were on the site of the present village of *Abu Shusheh*.) On the third wall were found thirty towers, of which all but two were later insertions. Six of the towers had also been buttressed at a later period. Mr. Macalister thinks that the third wall must have been standing at the time of the Tell el Amarna correspondence, at the time of Joshua and also when Pharaoh, the father of Solomon's Egyptian wife, came and took the city and presented¹ it to his daughter. Indeed, he would ascribe the inserted towers to Solomon, who refortified the city, building apparently not only the twenty-eight inserted towers but also filling in a gap 150 feet long made in the wall at the time of the city's capture. The buttresses against six of the more important towers he ascribes to the Syrian general Bacchides who hastily but unsuccessfully fortified the city against² Simon Maccabaeus.

These then are historic walls and as we reconstruct them in imagination from their remains today, it appears no wonder that the Israelites, fresh from their desert wanderings, found it no easy task to capture cities so encircled. The demonstration of the great antiquity of the second wall is even more remarkable. Here we find a wall of fine masonry, far finer than that of later ages, going back quite a thousand years before the exodus. The great brick gateway is particularly noticeable because stone and not brick is the natural building material in this locality. It probably points to foreign influence, indeed, to a strong Egyptian influence in Palestine long before the capture of the city by Tahutmes III, the earliest historic event in connection with which Gezer is mentioned in inscriptions. Evidences in favor of this are accumulating.

¹ I Kings 9:16.

² I Macc. 9:53.

Within the walls remains of some seven or eight cities of various periods have been found superimposed one on the other. The earliest inhabitants lived in caves and made all their weapons and



A JEWISH FLASK—GEZER

instruments of flint. In the middle period bronze is the only metal known while at a time roughly synchronous with the coming of Israel iron appears and gradually replaces bronze.

Until the period of the Maccabees, at the uppermost layer or nearly so, there are few striking buildings, except the great *Ba'al*

temple. The houses are small and the streets crooked and narrow. The even course of the streets changes from age to age; there is no main thoroughfare through the city. The city's palmy days appear to have been shortly before the time of Joshua and during the time of the Judges. Solomon's Egyptian father-in-law appears to have thoroughly emptied the city.

Among the remains in some of the earlier strata have been found great numbers of scarabs belonging to the little-known Hyksos period, two of the finest being those of Khyan (about 3100 B. C.) and Usertesen I (about 2750 B. C.).

2. The religious beliefs of the early inhabitants of Gezer may be inferred from many "finds." Indeed, it is especially for contributions on this subject, scanty though they are and hard sometimes to interpret, that the excavations should earn the gratitude of all interested in comparative religion. The *Ba'al* temple or "high place" has been previously described, so it will here call for but passing attention. Eight monoliths were found *in situ*, varying in height from ten feet nine inches to five feet five inches, arranged in a line running roughly north and south. In the middle of the series is a great square stone, six feet long by five broad, carefully hollowed out in the center, which may either be an altar or, as is thought by Mr. Macalister, the socket for the Asherah or "grove" which is usually supposed to have been a wooden pole. The whole area round the *maṣṣeboth* was paved with stones and under the pavement were discovered jars containing the remains of new-born infants, probably sacrificed firstborn. Under another part of the temple is a cave specially adapted for the giving of oracles, being furnished with a secret passage leading into another cave approached by a separate entrance, for the oracle giver. To the east of the temple area a circular pit was excavated at the bottom of which was found a small bronze image of a cobra. The inclosure was probably made for sacred serpents which we know were kept in connection with such temples in Egypt and Babylonia. When we recall that the children of Israel had made the "brazen serpent" of Moses an object of worship so that Hezekiah had to destroy it, this "find" is of peculiar interest.

The "high place" was evidently in its full glory shortly before the arrival of the Israelites, but worship was continued there at least

as late as the times of the judges. In the pre-Israelite times there is little doubt but that the *masseboth* were looked upon as phallic images and thus emblems of fertility; at this time at any rate, though probably not in more primitive times, the worship here was asso-



REMAINS OF AMORITE TEMPLE—GEZER

ciated with all that was objectionable in such worship in Phoenicia and other places.

A "high place" belonging to the most primitive inhabitants—who according to Mr. Macalister were a non-Semitic race—was uncovered when the original rock was laid bare on another part of the *tell*, 120 feet south of the *Ba'al* temple. This consisted of a rock surface ninety by eighty feet, covered with those curious emblems known as "cup-marks," which are so often found on the

rock surface of ancient sites in Palestine. These "cup-marks" are circular depressions cut out of the rock and in this place varied in size from eight feet in diameter and nine inches deep down to marks only a few inches across. No less than eighty-three were counted in this one place. In connection with this area were three caves, one of which was provided with a kind of "chute" down which offerings, sacrificial blood, etc., could be poured, from the sacred area above. In this cave were found a considerable number of pigs' bones; that the pig was a sacred animal, offered in sacrifice, in early times has long been known. What the cup-marks may have represented can be but a subject of speculation, possibly the sun or the sun and stars. It may be they were but receptacles used in a sacrificial ritual.

From these remains we are able to trace a progressive development of religious ritual extending over a period of at least two thousand years, including the ages most important to students of the Old Testament. At the earliest time we find the disk-like cup-marks and the clear evidences of animal sacrifice, but of detail we know nothing. This gives place to the sacred standing stone—the beth-el or dwelling-place of the Ba'al or local divinity. The original single stone, supposed in the case of the great "high place" to have been the shortest of all, the top of which was found worn smooth by the frequent kisses or anointings of the devout, at a later time is surrounded by others of more imposing dimensions, until the temple consisted of seven great *masseboth*. These were, probably gradually, interpreted to be phallic images, and the ritual became more and more associated with worship of the reproductive powers. This is shown by the enormous number of small phallic images found scattered in the débris around the *masseboth* and in the numerous earthenware plaques representing, with rude exaggeration of the sexual organs, Astarte, the goddess of fertility. The Asherah probably in some way also represented this goddess and may, too, have roughly borne some emblems similar to the plaques. When this idea had reached its full development the eighth stone must have been erected, for this, unlike the previous seven which were roughly hewn, is clearly shaped by hand to be a *simulacrum priapi*. The temple was at its height of renown about 1600 B. C., but afterwards evidently declined in

sanctity, as soon after houses were allowed to invade the previously inviolable sacred precincts. At this time the Israelites must have been dwelling in Gezer along with the Canaanites, and though very probably the worship of Yahweh was carried on in connection with the place it was of a higher order than in previous centuries. Gradually the high place fell into decay and the site was built over until at the time of the Maccabees only one stone could have stood conspicuously above the ground and this was thrown down, as it was found in the excavations, probably as part of the "purification" of the city. The thorough examinations of the many interments, from prehistoric times down to the early Christian centuries, on and around the *tell*, has thrown a flood of light on the burial customs of the inhabitants and thus indirectly on their religious beliefs.

In the earliest period, that of the pre-Semitic race, cremation was practiced, at any rate in the case of the more important people, and, contradictory as it seems, even then it was customary to provide the spirits of the departed with food. Among the ashes in the great crematorium cave were found groups of food vessels, some charred with fire. In the succeeding age, that of the earliest Semitic inhabitants, this custom of providing the deceased with food and drink is highly developed and large pots are deposited, carefully fixed up in position in corners of the tombs and provided with small pottery saucers for dipping out the contents in the same way as the modern *fellah* takes his drink out of the similar water pots on the same site today. With these drink offerings are food vessels some of which are found containing the mutton bones of the original food and carefully protected from dust by an inverted saucer covering them. In one instance a bronze spear head was found in the dish to assist the deceased in cutting up the food!

As the interment customs are traced from age to age the food offering becomes more and more a mere form until at last in early Christian times³ broken pottery or glass takes the place of the perfect, and doubtless valuable, vessels of earlier ages. But while the food and drink offerings become increasingly a mere formal ritual,

³ Although the *tell* site contains no Christian remains, the tombs of early Christian times in the vicinity are many; the site of the city of this period is off the *tell* proper, under the modern village.

the custom gradually appears of providing lamps in the tombs. In primitive times they are few, but in early Christian times, in the period when food offerings quite disappear, great quantities of lamps, running into hundreds, are found and some of them are inscribed with such inscriptions as "The Lord is my light." It would



AN AMORITE WATER-JAR—GEZER

seem then that from the early semi-materialistic belief that the spirit required food and drink—and weapons too, for they have been found in great numbers—gradually developed the thought that light was more needed in the dark underworld and this in early Christian ages led to the lamp symbolizing, in the darkness of the tomb, Him who is the "Light of the World." It is interesting, too, to

notice how these customs survive in the Orient today when lamps and candles are kept burning around the corpse among both Christians and Jews and are burnt for many days after the burial in the death chambers. Moslems too burn lamps in tombs on many occasions.

It is a discovery of considerable importance to find how extremely common was the custom of foundation sacrifices. The late Professor Samuel Ives Curtiss has shown how today sacrifices are made in Palestine when the foundations of public buildings are laid. Sheep are sacrificed and the blood is allowed to flow to the bottom of the site of the foundation stones. When this custom is traced back through the ages, as can be done at Gezer, to 2000 B. C., or earlier, the primitive rite is seen to be the sacrifice of new-born infants, possibly the first-born, the corpses of which were deposited in jars together with food offerings under the corners of the houses. At a later period, which from various data may be inferred to be about that of the coming of Israel, an extraordinary ritual occurs. A lamp, carefully protected by pottery dishes arranged around it, is buried under the foundations instead of the dead child. In some way not clear today the lamp is made to represent, and be a substitute for, the victim. Perhaps in it or with it was deposited blood. We know, however, from the Old Testament records that the sacrifice of actual human victims, though looked upon with an increasing dislike, occurred even in the times of the kings, for we read that Hiel, the Bethelite, in the days of Ahab, laid the foundation of Jericho "at the cost of the life of Abiram his first-born and set up the gates thereof at the cost of the life of Segub his youngest" (I Kings 16:34). That the custom of human sacrifice was at that time abhorred is also seen in the narrative of the king of Moab (II Kings 3:27), who, when closely besieged, "took his eldest son . . . and offered him for a burnt offering on the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel; and they departed from him and returned to their own land."

3. It was the hope of those who promoted the excavation of a site so prominent as Gezer, celebrated in both the Old Testament and Egyptian history, that some definite corroboration of history might be found in the archaeological remains. This hope has not been disappointed and when the site is fully excavated it will certainly be

abundantly fulfilled. Up to the present there have been several important confirmations. In what has been written about the walls and the "high place" some of these have been touched upon. One of the most definite is the sudden increase in the population of the city, as is shown by the encroachment on the sacred precincts of the "high place" as well as elsewhere at a period when, from other indications, e. g., the dates as shown by scarabs, etc., we might expect to find indications of the arrival of the children of Israel. Then at a later period we find there is a stratum in which the buildings by no means cover the area inclosed within the walls, in other words, when the population is much diminished. The date of this stratum from the pottery and other remains indicates the period of Solomon or thereabouts, and the reference is that the reduction of the population is due to Pharaoh's capture of the city and massacre of the inhabitants.

A still more definite historical clew is the finding of a Greek inscription scrawled on the wall of a large building which had previously been inferred to be the palace which history records that Simon Maccabaeus erected here. The rude graffito ran thus:

πάμπρα(ς) Σιμῶνος κατεπάγγη(?) π(ύρ?) βασιλειον,

which seems to mean "Pampras, may he bring down (fire) on the palace of Simon." The last words are certain. If all our archaeological speculations could receive so clear a substantiation, what encouragement the work of exploration would receive!

Mr. Macalister has also been able to make some most important observations on the names of the "royal" and other potters, whose stamps have been found on Jewish pottery here and elsewhere. A considerable number of the names found on the jar handles are clearly those of the very potters who, we read, "dwelt with the king for his work" (I Chron. 4:18).

When we turn to Egyptian history the most astounding revelation from these excavations is the extremely early period at which intimate relations existed between Canaan and Egypt. At no period, apparently, was connection between the two lands so close as during the days of the Hyksos or Shepherd kings who may, according to some authorities, have been actually themselves Canaan-

ites. But all through⁴ we find traces of Egyptian influence, and certainly the inferences from the archaeological finds are all against the theory that the Pharaoh of Solomon's time was any other than an Egyptian monarch. Gezer has produced nothing to support a theory of a north Arabian *Muzri*.

Most interesting historical "finds" are the two much broken cuneiform tablets. Although both referring only to land contracts (one including with the land a slave and his family), they are of extreme interest on account of their dates. They are much later than the famous Tell el Amarna tablets, to which in point of time the Tell el Hesi tablet belonged, nor do they belong to the series found by Prof. Sellin at Tell Ta'anak, which, even if not contemporaneous with the before mentioned, are at least not far removed from 1400 B. C. These two tablets can, by the occurrence of the names of eponyms, be exactly dated to 651 and 649 B. C., respectively. They belong therefore to the time of the great king Aššur-bani-pāl and show that he was not only a conqueror of Palestine but had organized government in the land so that legal civil business was here carried on in the language of Assyria.

Even so slight a sketch as this will show that the work already accomplished has been rich in results of first-class importance to Bible students and, as a large section of the *tell* yet awaits excavation, there may lie hidden even greater things. Even as the work was being closed a great system of early Egyptian tombs, as well as two graves containing handsome bronze ornaments not improbably Philistine, were brought to light, and intelligent students in all lands will join in the hope that what the Palestine Exploration Fund has, through Mr. Macalister, been able to begin they may resume with redoubled zeal and resources when during the present year the new *firman* is granted.

Those wishing to help the fund or to follow the subsequent results of the excavations of Gezer by taking the *Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund* are referred to Professor T. F. Wright, Ph.D., 42 Quincy Street, Cambridge, Mass., who is General Secretary of the Fund in the United States.

⁴ The earliest dated scarab belongs to Khyan (about 3100 B. C.); the latest Egyptian inscription from the *tell* bears the name Naifnaurud, the first king of the Twentieth Dynasty (399-93 B. C.).